ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Case File No.: AA-79870
AK-040-EA00-021

Type of Action:	Mining Claim Occupancy
Location:	T. 20 N., R. 1 E., Section 28, SM
Applicant:	Gilbert Hjellen, Susan Brown, Peter Hjellen, Ida McMahon P.O. Box 871684 Wasilla, Alaska 99687-1684
Prepared By:	Carl Persson
Preparing Office:	Bureau of Land Management Anchorage Field Office 6881 Abbott Loop Road Anchorage, Alaska 99507
Date:	September 25, 2000

I. INTRODUCTION

On September 12, 1996, Anna Short filed with the Anchorage Field Office (AFO) a notification of an existing occupancy on a Federal mining claim associated with the High Grade Mine, Sec. 28, T. 20 N., R. 1 E., SM. The filing was in accordance with the newly released mining claim occupancy regulations. Similarly on September 16, 1996, Elizabeth Hjellen and Marie Betts filed notification of an existing occupancy on a Federal mining claim for the same occupancy. Additionally, on June 2, 1998, an occupancy worksheet was submitted as requested by AFO.

On August 25, 1998, the property was quit-claim deeded to the current claimants (Gilbert Hjellen, Susan Brown, Peter Hjellen, Ida McMahon), who are members of the same family, for $10 and other considerations. In accordance with Federal regulations, a Mining Notice was received by AFO from Mr. Peter Hjellen on June 15, 2000. Residential occupancy is listed as a necessary component of his families' mining operation. A new occupancy worksheet was submitted to AFO on June 16, 2000.

The claimants hold 14 unpatented Federal mining claims at Hatcher Pass, Alaska. The property is connected to the Alaska State Highway road system by a rough system of narrow dirt roads.

The family has owned the mining claims and occupancy structure for over 60 years. The wood frame structure was constructed by Gerrit and Alice Snider in 1938, and has remained in family ownership ever since. Substantial lode mining for gold occurred on the property during the 1930's, but the property has been inactive for many years. The claimants intend to eventually reopen the mine.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

The claimants have requested an occupancy authorization for continued use and occupancy in order to conduct gold exploration activities on their Federal lode mining claims.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:

The proposed mining claim occupancy is within lands included in the Southcentral Planning Area MFP, dated March 1980. One of the plan objectives (Objective M-1) states that the Bureau provide opportunities for the identified economic reserves of locatable and leasable minerals. Another plan objective (Objective M-2.1) states that the Bureau make available for exploration those areas of identified sub-economic reserves and undiscovered resources of locatable and leasable minerals. The Proposed Action is in conformance with these land use plan objectives.

C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policies, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses:

The regulations for authorizing occupancies on Federal mining claims are found at 43 CFR Part 3715. As established by regulation, the NEPA analysis for mining claim occupancy authorization is considered separately from the 43 CFR Part 3809 Surface Management Regulations which considers mining impacts.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action is to continue the mining claim use and occupancy of existing structures for the claimants in order for them to conduct lode exploration activities on their Federal mining claims. The occupancy site consists of approximately ¼ acre of cleared and leveled land containing a well maintained wood frame cabin and a small shed. There is no proposal to build new structures on the mining claims. In order for the claimants to continue the use and occupancy of the structures on their Federal mining claim, BLM must issue an occupancy authorization. The cabin is within Section 28, T. 20 N., R. 1 E., Seward Meridian.

Access can be achieved by automobile in the summer months via Fishhook Road north of Palmer. The property is located in the bowl above the Independence Mine Visitor Center at the very end of the road. A gate prevents public vehicular access past the visitor center, but the Alaska State Parks has traditionally allowed mining claimants and private property inholders to drive past the gate. There is no access past the visitor center during the winter months due to heavy winter snowfall, except by foot, skis or snow machine. The proposed duration for the occupancy would be June 1 through the end of October 2000.

B. No Action Alternative:

The only alternative is the No Action Alternative. Under this alternative the BLM would not authorize the proposed occupancy. Without an occupancy authorization, the structure could remain, be moved, or be removed, depending on the claimant's decision. In all cases the unauthorized occupancy would be managed in accordance with the 3715 regulations.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:

The following critical elements are either not present or would not be affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative:

Air Quality
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

Environmental Justice
Farm Lands, Prime or Unique
Floodplains
Invasive, Non-native Species
Native American Religious Concerns
Threatened and Endangered Species
Wetlands/Riparian Zones
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

1. Cultural:
The cabin was constructed in1938 by Gerit and Alice Snider for mining purposes. The cabin has never been formally evaluated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

The cabin is located within the Alaska Hatcher Pass State Recreation Area and adjacent to the Alaska Independence Mine Historical Park. The cabin predates the Recreation Area and Historical Park designations.

2. Subsistence:
No change in Federal Subsistence Management Program authority or implementation would occur from the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative. The Proposed Action or No Action Alternative will not significantly restrict subsistence uses, decrease the abundance of subsistence resources, alter the distribution of resources, or limit subsistence user access from currently existing conditions.

The following critical elements will be affected by the Proposed Action:

3. Water Quality, Surface/Ground:
There are no known water quality problems in the local area, but due to past lode mining and milling operations, there may be unknown areas of degraded water quality. The water is regularly tested at the State Independence Mine Historical Park Visitors Center, located less than a mile from the occupancy site, and no problems have ever been reported.

4. Wastes, Hazardous or Solid:
Solid and potential hazardous wastes exist on the subject mining claims from past underground lode mining activities during the 1930's. Moderate quantities of historic mining equipment are scattered about the area. Human waste from the ongoing occupancy is disposed of in a pit outhouse.

B. Vegetation:
The vegetation consists mainly of high alpine tundra, berries and various grasses. Most of the surrounding area has been subject to lode gold mining in the past.

C. Wildlife:
Wildlife in the area includes moose, occasional black and brown bears, wolves, and various birds and small mammals. Regional wildlife densities are fairly low.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Critical elements:

a. Water Quality, Surface/Ground:
There would be impacts to water quality from the production of grey water through kitchen and household activities. Grey water is usually disposed of through pipes leading to a sump pit where it would migrate down, merge, and be quickly diluted by the local groundwater.

(2) Wastes, Hazardous or Solid:
Minor amounts of solid household and human waste would be produced. Household waste would consist primarily of kitchen waste. Minor amounts of household hazardous waste would be generated, primarily from the use of household cleaners and solvents. Pit outhouses would be used to deal with human waste. Occasionally, new pits would have to be dug and the outhouses moved.

2. Vegetation:
Vegetation in the immediate vicinity of the structures would be cleared and the existing structures maintained. Structures create an elevated need for wild-land fire protection for the area. The existence of structures usually results in a designation of a full suppression level of fire management in the local fire protection management plan.

3. Wildlife:
The presence of food or improperly disposed garbage will occasionally attract bears. There is approximately ¼ acre of lost habitat, principally impacting small mammals and birds, created by the occupancy. Additionally, the noise and activity associated with the occupancy will tend to cause many wildlife species to avoid the site and relocate to other areas. However, there is no shortage of similar habitat in the region for impacted

species to relocate to. Wildlife impacts from the occupancy site would be minor compared to impacts from the many hikers, skiers, berry pickers, and general tourists that visit the area.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:
The principal impact of not authorizing the requested mining claim occupancy is there would be no occupancy by the claimants on their Federal mining claims. Because of the remoteness of this location, exploration and mining activities would be difficult without a mining claim occupancy authorization. There is no immediately local alternative housing or realistic opportunity to commute to the property. Additional impacts might include that the existing structures be removed or not be maintained, depending on the decision of the claimants.

1. Critical elements:
   a. Water Quality, Surface/Ground:
   Under the No Action Alternative there would be no impacts to water quality from the production of grey water through kitchen and household activities.

   b. Wastes, Hazardous or Solid:
   Under the No Action Alternative, no additional household and human waste would be produced. No household hazardous waste would be generated. No pit outhouses would be needed to deal with human waste.

2. Vegetation:
   Vegetation in the immediate vicinity of the structures would not need to be cleared. No elevated need for wild-land fire protection would be needed, although other structures in the area would still create a need for fire protection.

3. Wildlife:
   There would be no presence of food or improperly disposed garbage to attract bears. If the structures were removed, there is approximately ¼ acre of lost habitat, principally impacting small mammals and birds, that could be reclaimed.

C. Cumulative Impacts:

1. Critical Elements:

a. Water Quality, Surface/Ground:
Under the Proposed Action there would be minor cumulative impacts to water quality from the production of grey water through kitchen and household activities.

b. Wastes, Hazardous or Solid:
There would be minor cumulative impacts associated with the Proposed Action from the additional small amounts of solid household and human waste produced. Household waste would consist primarily of kitchen waste. Occasionally, new pits for outhouses would have to be dug and the outhouses moved creating a small amount of cumulative surface impacts.

2. Vegetation:
There would be minor cumulative impacts to vegetation in the immediate vicinity of the structures as vegetation would be cleared and pathways/trails from foot traffic created around and between the structures. Such impacts would quickly disappear upon cessation of the occupancy.

3. Wildlife:
There would be a minor cumulative impact to wildlife. There is approximately ¼ acre of lost habitat, principally impacting small mammals and birds, created by the occupancy. Additionally, the noise and activity associated with the occupancy will tend to cause some wildlife species to be displaced from the site and relocate to other areas.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. List of Preparers:
Carl Persson - Geologist (Certified Mineral Examiner #035) Lead Preparer
Jeff Denton - Subsistence Coordinator
Bruce Seppi - Threatened and Endangered Species Coordinator
Donna Redding - Archeologist
Dave Kelley - 3809 Surface Management Coordinator